



IFES Quarterly Report: January 1, 2005 – March 31, 2005

Guinea: Technical Assistance to the CNE
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. DGC A-00-01-000400
Project Period: June 12, 2002 – December 31, 2003*

Total Budget: \$200,000 Expenses Recorded to Date: \$66,228

** IFES' reprogramming request for this project is pending.

Results Summary

- Engaged in dialogue with USAID Guinea on re-programming funds;
- Discussion with members of the international community and Guinean stakeholders to look into ways to assist the electoral process, through voter registry and training of préfets and sous préfets.

Background

On January 5, the new Prime Minister, Cellou Dallein Diallo, invited all the political parties to participate in a dialogue process to discuss Guinea's future. The radical opposition parties accepted the invitation, marking the occasion as the first time in nearly two years that the entire political class sat together around the table. The following day, however, Antoine Soromou, leader of the National Alliance for Development (a small opposition party), was arrested by Security Minister Moussa Sampil. All parties were convened on the following day to resume the dialogue process, but the FRAD parties (radical opposition) were absent. Despite these setbacks, public opinion remains highly positive in regards to the new prime minister, who has begun addressing key issues such as meeting with political parties, unions and the private sector, as well as, adopting strict economic measures in response to the inflation crisis.

On January 18, there was an attempt to assassinate President Lansana Conté as he was riding into town in the presidential convoy. It is unclear to date who orchestrated the shooting. The President addressed the public on national television the following evening to reassure them that an investigation was under way. The investigation, however, provided the pretext for a massive witch hunt in which the country is witnessing arbitrary arrests, road blocks, and other human rights exactions. The government also staged "forced" support campaigns and demonstrations on the part of various sectors of Guinean society (religious leaders, civil service, government members, youth groups, women's groups, etc.). Continuous pro-president and government propaganda were aired on state controlled radio and television.

On February 19, M. Paul Yomba Kourouma, the lawyer of the opposition leader Antoine Soromou and M. Benn Pepito, head of the famous private newspaper *La Lance* were arrested in relation to the attempted assassination of the President. The morning following the arrest, an unprecedented outburst of solidarity was manifested by the Bar Association and other CSOs asking for the immediate liberation of the two prisoners. The fact that the Ordre National des Medecins (medical doctor's association), and even the Veterinarians Association

manifested their sympathy and concern has observers praising the work of IFES in developing networking and advocacy techniques amongst CSOs. Protest actions included the presence of most members of the Bar Association at the police station, requesting to be arrested as well. Another sign of change is that the Prime Minister accepted a meeting with an important delegation of media professionals protesting against the arbitrary arrest of their colleague and this meeting was broadcast on national television and radio the same evening.

The end of February brought a glimpse of reform as the new Prime Minister and some of his colleagues seemed determined to try to put Guinea back on track. Based on a report by an inter-ministerial committee, it was announced that liberalization of the airwaves is imminent (it should be noted that the report was based on a background paper prepared by an IFES initiated taskforce established following the national conference on Media in May 2004). Three unpopular ministers were dismissed including Moussa Sampil, Minister of Security. He was responsible for many of the arbitrary arrests and other criticized initiatives. The Minister of Administration (MATD) Kiridi Bangoura met with donors and political parties (opposition included) to discuss the upcoming election of communal leaders and the topic of decentralization. He informed state officials throughout the country to allow political party leaders and militants to circulate freely and hold meetings. He is still pushing for June elections but the international community seems to agree that the schedule would be tight. The ministry is discussing the establishment of an electoral commission with parity representation, the use of a single ballot (if assistance is provided for civic education) and transparent ballot boxes. Kiridi has also asked for assistance to update the electoral list. The minister has said that he wants to organize these elections with the full participation of all the main political parties and that the entire process, voter registration, vote count, result compilation, etc. would be done in a transparent fashion.

The improved political climate brought the main opposition parties back to the negotiation table in early March. The political will of the government to unblock Guinea's critical macro-economic, political and social crisis was highlighted last week with a visit to Guinea by an important EU delegation whose mandate was to evaluate Guinea's progress in implementing reform. The inter-ministerial committee presented an optimistic update concerning the liberalization of the media, political dialogue and anti-corruption policies. On the electoral front, it seems unlikely that local elections will take place in June; however, the EU committed themselves to provide financial support as early as July. Unfortunately, elections cannot take place during the rainy season which lasts from July through October.

Program Activities

IFES Country Director Elizabeth Côté and Director of Programs, Bakary Fofana attended the Conference on Electoral Reform in Africa, sponsored by the Gorée Institute in Dakar, Senegal. The meeting took place January 18-20 and brought together representatives of electoral management body networks and election-related African organizations from over 15 countries. The objective was to discuss the establishment of an African Electoral Commission tasked with setting standards and guidelines for credible and legitimate electoral processes on the continent. While at the Gorée conference, there was talk of organizing a special meeting on Guinea, to promote dialogue and prevent conflict that IFES could potentially participate in and contribute to financially.

In early March, IFES consulted with the international community and Guinean stakeholders to discuss ways to assist the electoral process in reference to the upcoming local elections. IFES Country Director wrote an exploratory letter to the Minister to see whether the MATD would be interested in sending in a technical specialist in electoral and administrative registries. The Minister had also requested assistance from IFES in training the préfets and sous préfets in rights, responsibilities, and the electoral process. A short concept paper on the training was prepared and sent to the MATD.

The local elections will not occur until the fall, therefore IFES will continue to communicate with the MATD and investigate means for the reprogramming of the remaining TA funds.